DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 369 046 CS 011 664

AUTHOR Ferlazzo, Janet S.
TITLE The Effect of Reading Aloud on a Child's Success in First Grade.
PUB DATE Apr 94
NOTE 32p.; M.A. Project, Kean College of New Jersey.
PUB TYPE Dissertations/Theses - Undetermined (040) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Grade 1; *Parent Child Relationship; *Parent Participation; Primary Education; *Reading Achievement; *Reading Aloud to Others; Reading Research
IDENTIFIERS New Jersey; Parent Surveys

ABSTRACT

A study determined whether reading aloud to children before entering school would influence their reading grade level as determined by their report card grade. Subjects, 85 first-grade children in a suburban school district in central New Jersey, took surveys home to be completed by parents. Results indicated that: (1) those children who were read to before entering first grade received a "C" or better in reading; (2) reading aloud was a shared responsibility between parents; and (3) the majority of reading occurs in the evening. Findings suggest that parents are actively engaged in reading aloud to their children and that such activity is beneficial and advantageous for the child. (Contains 31 references and 9 tables of data; the letter to parents and the survey instrument are attached.) (RS)

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ED 369 046

The Effect of Reading Aloud on a Child's Success in First Grade

by

Janet S. Ferlazzo

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement For The

Master of Arts

Kean College of New Jersey

April, 1994

CS011664

Abstract

This study was conducted to determine if reading aloud to children before entering school would influence their reading grade level as determined by their report card grade. Eighty-five first grade children participated in the study. The study concluded that reading aloud is a shared responsibility between parents. It also concluded that the majority of reading occurs in the evening.

Results indicated that those children who were read to before entering first grade received a C or better in reading as measured by their report card grade.

Acknowledgment

I dedicate this paper to those who inspired and encouraged me. To Dr. Mazurkiewicz for his wise counsel, providing sound guidance, while allowing this paper to remain mine. To my husband Frank, for his emotional support and belief in education. To my family, for their patience, understanding and assistance, and to my mother who instilled in me that learning is a lifetime endeavor.

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Researchers have consistently found a positive correlation between being read to both at home and in school, and reading achievement or reading readiness. Jim Trelease (1989) a leading advocate of reading aloud, believes that to insure the desire for reading aloud we must advertise the product. In his opinion reading aloud allows the child to sample the delights of reading. According to Drs. Schuman and Relihan,(1990) "Children exposed to a print rich environment form expectations about print that are likely to grow throughout their school life. This early emphasis on literature development fosters reading readiness."

In a society where many women have returned to work the caregiver is given the responsibility of introducing literature to preschool age children. By the year 1995, two to three preschool children will have both parents working, and by the year 2000, it is estimated that 70 to 80 percent of all mothers with children under five will be working full time. With these statistics on the horizon, it is inevitable that the caregiver will play a vital role in a child's literacy development. Dr. Dinsmore, (1988) an Infant and Child Development Specialist mentions in her article "Baby's First Books," that infants are far more aware and capable of learning then was previously thought. Trelease, (1985) also notes that infants are eager and anxious to learn. They are able to distinguish sights and sounds, imitate adults actions

and actively work to modify their environment, all within a few weeks of birth. As advocated by Drs. Schuman and Relihan "The ultimate goal of emergent literacy - to structure an environment that is rich in print-enables children to acquire basic literacy concepts at a very early age."

Chomsky(1972) found that the language of books exposes children to a higher level of syntactic complexity than other oral language activities, while McCormie (1977) noted that the experiences of listening to books not only develops positive attitudes toward reading but also has positive effects on children's cognitive and academic growth. Locke (1988) Parents who read to their children notice development of imagination and creativity, and an increases understanding of themselves and others, while Warren, Prater, Griswold (1990) believe that if beginning readers have not had an exposure to literature before entering school, chances are they are unlikely to see any reason for learning to read since, for them the skill has little application or importance.

Hypothesis

Reading aloud to children at home does not have a positive effect on children's success rate in the first grade as measured by their report card grades.

Procedure

A questionnaire was distributed to eighty-five (85) children in the first grade in a suburban school district in central New Jersey, to be taken home for parents' responses. The response to the questionnaire was on a volunteer basis. Prior to distribution, the cover letter and questionnaire were approved by the principal.

The information which was collected was analyzed and a correlation drawn between the amount of time read to the children and their reading grade in first grade. Questions included in this survey focused on how often the children were read to, at what age this began, who read or reads to the children, and the types of books chosen.

Results

Table I - Illustrates reading aloud to children. It indicates that reading aloud is a shared responsibility in most families.

TABLE I

Which parents read aloud in the home?

Mothers	Fathers	Both
52.9%	12.9%	34.1%

Table II - Indicates that reading is practiced on a daily or weekly basis.

TABLE II

Frequency of reading aloud

Daily	Weekly
63.5%	36.5%

Table III - Represents the time of day children were read to on a regular basis.

TABLE III

Time of day reading aloud takes place

Anytime	Afternoon	Evening	Bedtime
11.7%	14.1%	40%	35.2%

Table IV - Represents the age reading aloud was initiated.

TABLE IV

Age reading aloud to child was initiated

0 - 1 yr.	1yr.- 2yr.	3 yr. - 4 yr.	5yr.
43%	34%	17%	6%

Table V - Indicates children chose fiction books to be read aloud over non fiction. The responses indicated a wide variety of reading material which ranged from fairytales to factual passages in science books.

Table V

Types of material read to children

Fiction	Non-Fiction
94.1%	21.1%

Table VI - Represents the number of parents which discuss the book illustrations with their children

TABLE VI

Discussion of books

Discussion	Non-Discussion
96.4%	3.6%

Table VII - Indicates the number of parents which asked their children questions while reading.

TABLE VII

Parents which asked their children questions

Discussion	Non Discussion
91.7%	8.3%

Table VIII - Illustrates which children choose books from the library.

TABLE VIII

Children who chose books from the library

Attends Library	Does not Attend Library
91.7%	8.3%

Table IX - Represents the reading grades students received in the 2nd marking quarter of first grade.

94.1% (80) of all children surveyed were read to before entering school and they received grades of C or better.

5.9% (5) of all children surveyed were not read to before entering school and they received grades of D or below.

TABLE IX

Breakdown of children's grades in the sample

GRADE RECEIVED	% OF STUDENTS	TOTAL # STUDENTS
A+ (97-100)	14.1%	12
A (93-96)	30.5%	26
B+ (89-92)	15.2%	13
B (85-88)	12.9%	11
C+ (80-84)	8.1%	7
C (75-79)	12.9%	11
D (70-74)	3.5%	3
F (below 70)	2.2%	2

Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to verify that reading aloud to children at home does have a positive effect on a child's success rate in the first grade as measured by the report card grade. All evidence which was surveyed and evaluated proves this hypothesis to be true.

Children who were read to before entering school, received a grade of C or better on their report card grade in reading. The children who were not read to before entering school, received a grade of D or below on their report card grade in reading. However, two of these children were from Bi-lingual speaking homes. Parents did not read to their children in English, but may have read to their children in their native language.

The conclusion of this research indicated that 52.9% of all mothers who were surveyed read to their children, while 12.9% of all fathers surveyed read to their children. The survey also indicated 34.1% of both parents read to their children illustrating that reading is often a share responsibility in the home. Additional information concluded that 63.5% of all parents who read to their children read daily and 36.5% of all parents who read to their children read weekly. The most popular time to read to a child was evening.

The age at which reading aloud to children began varied considerably, with the greatest percent being between birth and 1 year of age. Evidence indicated children are interested in various types of material with the largest selection being fiction. 96.4% of all parents surveyed took the time to discuss book illustrations with their children, and 91.7% of all parents who were surveyed asked their children questions about the book they were reading. 91.7% of all parents surveyed noted that their children chose books from the library.

The evidence secured from the research implies that parents are actively engaged with literature and reading aloud to their children. Results indicate that reading aloud to children before they enter school is beneficial and advantageous for the child.

Related Literature

Experts in the field of education agree that the home environment and experiences influence a child's intellectual development. According to Anderson, Hilbert, Scott and Wilkinson (1985) a rich background of experiences is an attribute for success in school, but the single most important factor for success in school is reading aloud to children before they enter school.

Jim Trelease (1990) a leading advocate of reading aloud to children tells us we need to "advertise" reading. We need to read to our children to entice them and instill in them the desire to read. Reading aloud is simple, its fun and its inexpensive, but the benefits are monumental.

Reading on a regular basis to children stimulates their creativity and imagination. According to Rayborn (1993) parents and the environment in the home play a major role in a child's success and interest in reading. It was found that verbal interaction, parental reading habits, attitudes about learning, and the opportunity to learn were closely related to a child's ability and achievement, while Teale (1981) noted that almost every reading method book or education book written recommends that parents read to young children in order to provide a sound foundation to read and write. Goodman and Haussler(1986) Indicates that when parents read to children, they learn that books are read from front to back, pages are read from top to bottom, and words and sentences are read from left to right.

They also learn that print tells the story.

Many authors have created material for the parents who don't perceive reading aloud as a part of their home activity. The authors suggest strategies to teach and inform parents about the rewarding experience of reading aloud and its benefits. Crisculo (1980) indicates that the New Haven Public Schools offers a brochure for parents that answers questions about reading. This brochure encourages parents to request both oral and written feedback on the child's reading progress in school. Baker(1975) describes a non-credit course for parents on literature for children. It introduces parents to quality literature to share with their children. Trezise (1975) offers parents a six week course in the research of story books and different ways to share them with children.

A study by Flood (1977) demonstrates the need for children to be actively involved in story time. Parents were tape-recorded while reading to their children. The parents were given no specific directions or procedures to follow. They were to simply read to their child as they usually did. Flood analyzed the frequency and style of interaction that was present. Flood found that the child needs to be involved with the book from beginning to end. It was important that the child interacts with the reader, to extend ideas, to question their own understanding, and to relate their own experiences.

Another study by Wells (1986) stated that the major

influences for differences in literacy for children was growing up in a literate family environment where reading and writing are naturally occurring activities. He further noted that of all the activities that were characteristic of homes, it was the sharing of stories that was found to be most important.

Yaden, Smalkin and Colon (1989) conducted a study involving preschool-age children. The study required the parent to read aloud to their child. The child's spontaneous questions were examined to determine their literacy development. The most frequently asked questions were about pictures, followed by inquiries on story meaning and finally word meaning. The conclusion was that home storybook reading may have more of an effect on the child's development of comprehension processes than on their print awareness. The authors feel that, "exposing children to as many sources of written information in the environment as possible before school cannot help but give them the kind of foundation needed for success mastery of this most complicated human invention."

A nationwide survey was conducted by Warren, Prater and Griswold. (1990) The survey targeted read aloud practices by working parents. The study involves 555 preschool children from a middle class area whose parents work full time. The children were enrolled in the Kinder Care Learning Centers. 28.4% were three year olds, 39.4% were four year olds, and 32.2% were five year olds. 83.4% of the children were read to three to four times a

week. 64.9% of the mothers read more frequently than fathers. 99.6% of the surveys indicated occasional verbal interaction during read aloud sessions. The conclusion of this survey was that working parents read aloud to their preschool age children from easily accessible literature.

Parent focused program designs to overcome the deficits of poorly educated poverty parents is often needed. Swift (1970) designed a pilot program to assist poverty mothers gain skills needed for interaction with their children. The training program was designed to enhance the story telling and communication skills of poverty mothers with limited education. Reading was never taught. The focus was on training mothers to elaborate thoughts and ideas, lengthen and complete thoughts and improve observational skills.

Joanne C. Burgess conducted a study (1982) to determine the effectiveness of initiating a program for parents of four and five year old preschool age children. The purpose of the study was to investigate the differences in readiness scores of children, whose parents participated in the program. The workshops focused on letter recognition, oral reading techniques and visual matching exercises. The test results concluded that the children whose parents participated in the program scored signifying higher then the child whose parents did not participate in the program. The findings show that reading readiness will increase with this intervention method.

The experts continue to reveal that reading aloud to children is enjoyable and beneficial. Mason and Blanton (1971) chose to further investigate this belief by selecting a stratified sampling of one hundred eighty, three, four and five year old children to participate in a program. The children were asked specific questions such as, "Do you like to have stories read to you?", and "What stories would you like to hear?", and "What stories would you like to read all by yourself?" All of the children were interested in being read to. Many of them showed an interest in fairy tales, animal stories, television characters stories, and stories about machines. This conclusion tends to support the thought that beginning reading material should include stories children prefer in order to capture a child's interest.

Stewart (1992) conducted a study involving fifty six kindergarten children who were selected from two schools that used different instructional methods in reading. One school used whole language, while the other school used a beginning phonics based program. Both classes were asked questions to tap their awareness of learning to read. The conclusions indicated that some children are able to accurately describe what is occurring in the classroom and attach some meaning to the events. The children with a more literate background were better able to express their ideas.

Evidence continues to demonstrate the advantages of pre-school exposure to reading. Dolores Durkins (1975) conducted a six year study involving pre-first grade children. The

objective of the study was to determine if participation in a two year language arts program would be advantageous to the children's achievement. The children were monitored until the fourth grade. For each of the four years, the reading achievement of the experimental children exceeded that of the control group. One more finding from the studies of home readers need to be mentioned. It is the fact that parents frequently read to these children, and also found or took the time to talk with them and to answer their questions. Each day of the two-year program began with a conversation period.

Indrisano (1980) has found that teachers of beginning reading have long observed that children who were read to in their preschool years are more prepared for formal reading instruction and are more successful in learning to read then are children who were not read to early in life. Validation of this observation is found in Durkin's (1966) and Mason's (1977) research.

Feitelson, Kita, and Goldstein (1986) conducted a study which further reinforces the belief that reading aloud to children enhances their cognitive skills. The study investigated the effects of reading to disadvantaged first graders. Experimental and control classes were chosen randomly from the same school. Children were read to in a whole-class setting for the last twenty minutes of the school day, for six months. Children in the control classes continued their usual learning activities. Children who had been read to outscored children in the control

classes on measures of decoding, reading comprehension, and active use of language. According to Chomsky,(1972) Clark,(1976) and Durkins,(1966, 1984) casual links have been established between parental reading to children and academic success. (Heath,1982;Cochran-Smith,1984) We assume a causal relationship between reading achievement and being read to. Extensive reading to young children before they are able to do so themselves may develop attitudes, abilities and skills beyond the decoding-related insights enhanced by other daily life literacy events.

A composite measure was developed by Morrow (1983) to study kindergarten children from twenty one classrooms who had a high or low interest in literature. Parent questionnaires and tests provided information concerning the children's free-time home activity. Significant differences were found between the high and low interest groups. High interest children were read to more often than the low interest children. The high interest children watched less television, and had more books placed in many rooms in the home. Parents of the high interest children provided supportive environments at home, whereas those in the low interest group did not.

Another study by Morrow, Strickland, Feitelson and Iraqi (1990) examined the value of reading aloud to Israeli kindergarten children. The study involved twelve classes of thirty five students. Each were assigned to either the control group or the experimental group. The experimental group was read to for

fifteen minutes each day from a storybook that had no accompanying illustrations. The control group used the time period for a language program. After five months individual tests of listening comprehension and picture story telling showed that the children who had been read to outperformed their peers. They showed a greater language maturity, a richer vocabulary and a stronger sense of story structure when retelling a story.

Martinez and Teale (1987) believe a key goal is to foster voluntary reading among the children so that they will develop positive attitudes and the inclination to engage in reading. Recent research has indicated that the best predictor of a child's growth in reading and vocabulary is the amount of time spent reading. Research has made it clear (Wilson and Anderson, 1986) that for most children in literate societies, learning to read begins very early in life, establishing voluntary reading habits. Five year olds can be encouraged to select books for independent use and enjoyment.

Cohen (1968) believes continued exposure in early childhood to stories read aloud affects basic beginning stages of the transition that must take place in growth from comprehension of oral language to the final use of symbols of reading. Smith (1992) believes that the simple act of reading aloud to children serves a multiplicity of vital purposes. It puts children in the company of people who read and spark their interest in the consequences of reading. Reading informs children and most important, it puts

them in the company of authors. Allen, Giard and Kristo (1991) indicates that reading aloud should be a part of our lives with our children. They should be able to see that reading is the basis not only for school, but for life.

The experts in the field support the belief that reading aloud to children is an investment in the future. Reading prepares the mind, nurtures the spirit and educates the soul. It is one of the most influential factors which parents can offer their children. Reading aloud to young children offers them a legacy of cognizance and creativity.

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Appendices

November 4, 1993

Dear Parents:

I am currently researching the reading process of elementary children to complete a project for graduate school. Your help in filling out this questionnaire is an important part of my study.

Responding to this should only take a few minutes of your time. Please include information pertaining only to your first grade child. If you feel inclined, please add any additional comments on your family's reading habits.

All responses will be kept anonymous. Please return this to me by Tuesday, November 9th, in the enclosed envelope. Thank you in advance for your help.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Ferlazzo

QUESTIONNAIRE

Age of your child _____

Who normally reads to your child? Mother____ Father____

How often do you read to your child? Daily____ Weekly____

At what time do you read? _____

How old was your child when you started reading to him/her? _____

What types of books or magazines do you read to your child?

_____

Is there a favorite place in the home where your child likes to be read to? _____

When you read to your child do you discuss the pictures?

Yes____ No____

Do you discuss the story as you read, asking questions or explaining certain words or phrases? Yes____ No____

Does your child choose books from the library? Yes____ No____